

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 0415

E.O.11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, SP
SUBJECT: FRAGA'S LATEST VIEWS

1. FRAGA LUNCHEDED WITH SATURDAY, JANUARY 15. HE WAS IN A MORE SUBDUE MOOD THAN IS HIS CUSTOM, PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF HIS BEING TEMPERED IN THE FIRE OF AN UNUSUALLY VITRIOLIC CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIM IN THE PRESS. AT THE SAME TIME HE DIDN'T SAY MUCH THAT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED FROM HIM AS THE LEADER OF WHAT HAS BECOME THE CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION TO THE SUAREZ GOVERNMENT. HE AVOIDED CRITICIZING THE KING, BUT SOME OF THE ASIDES GAVE TESTIMONY AGAIN TO THE UNCOMFORTABLE RELATIONSHIP THAT EXISTS BETWEEN HIM AND THE KING.

2. FRAGA GAVE THE GOS REASONABLE MARKS FOR MUCH OF ITS POLITICAL PROGRAM, NOTING WITH SOME JUSTICE THAT HE HAD PUSHED MUCH OF THIS IN THE ARIAS CABINET THOUGH WE MUST ADD THAT HE DID NOT PUSH IT WITH THE SKILLS SUAREZ HAS SHOWN TO DATE. FRAGA CITED THREE AREAS OF WHAT HE TERMED SERIOUS GOVERNMENT DEFICIENCIES, THE ECONOMIC, THE REGIONAL (PARTICULARLY THE BASQUE PROVINCES) AND THE HANDLING OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY.

3. ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT, HE REPEATED THE USUAL ARGU-
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MENTS THAT THE GOS COULD NOT AFFORD TO WAIT FOR ELECTIONS AND THAT IT WOULD BE EASIER TO ACT NOW. FRAGA POINTED OUT THAT SPAIN'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS REALLY BEGAN WHEN THE FIRST OPEC PRICE RISES TOOK PLACE AND THE TEN FINANCE MINISTER BARRERA DE IRIMO CHOSE TO TREAT IT AS A TEMPORAL RATHER THAN A LONG TERM STRUCTURAL PROBLEM BUT THAT DID NOT EXCUSE THE GOS FOR ITS CURRENT INACTION.

IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION, FRAGA SAID THAT DESPITE THE STORIES THERE WAS NO CONSPIRACY AMONG THE MONIED CLASSES TO FOSTER ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES IN ORDER TO BRING ON MILITARY INTERVENTION. THERE WERE COCKTAIL PARTY RUMOR MONGERS, BUT THEY DID NOT REPRESENT THE SPANISH BUSINESS COMMUNITY. THE MAIN PROBLEM WAS A LACK OF INVESTOR CONFIDENCE, NOTHING MORE.

4. THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT DONE WELL AT ALL ON THE BASQUE ISSUE. THE AMNESTY PROCLAIMED AFTER SUAREZ INSTALLATION WAS A GOOD ONE, BUT A FURTHER AMNESTY WOULD BE A TRICKY BUSINESS. FRAGA VOLUNTEERED THAT HE SOMETIMES WAS TOO INFLEXIBLE BUT, NONETHELESS, THE GOVERNMENT HAD TO MAINTAIN AUTHORITY. ANY FURTHER RELEASE WOULD HAVE TO STOP SHORT OF THOSE WHO HAD ACTUALLY KILLED PEOPLE. INTERESTINGLY, HE SAID IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO RELEASE EVEN THOSE INVOLVED IN THE 1973 CARRERO BLANCO KILLING BUT KILLINGS THAT TOOK PLACE AFTER THE KING HAD COME TO POWER COULD NOT BE REWARDED BY THE RELEASE OF ASSASINS.

5. WITH REGARD TO THE COMMUNISTS, HE SAID HE DIDN'T CARE THAT MUCH ABOUT LEGALIZATION, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, BUT CLAIMED THE GOS WAS FOLLOWING A POLICY THAT GAVE TOO MUCH LATITUDE TO THE PCE. PERMITTING THEM TO GROW IN STRENGTH. THE GOS SHOULD BE TOUGHER ON THE COMMUNISTS, HE SAID, WITHOUT OFFERING SPECIFICS. (BY WAY OF CONTRAST, THE GOS CHIEF SPECIALIST ON PUBLIC OPINION TOLD US THAT HE WAS CONVICTED ON THE BASIS ON THE AVAILABLE DATE THAT THE COMMUNISTS CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD GET NO MORE THAN SEVEN PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE SHOULD THEY RUN ALONE).

6. FRAGA ADMITTED THE GOS WAS BASICALLY CORRECT IN CONCENTRATING ON THE TRADITIONAL OPPOSITION IN RESPECT TO SECURING SOME KIND OF CONSENSUS ON THE ELECTORAL LAW SINCE THE ALIANZA POPULAR WOULD NOT REALLY CAUSE THE GOS ANY TROUBLE IN THIS RESPECT. NONETHELESS, THERE WERE CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS, NOT BECAUSE OF IMMEDIATE GAIN FOR THE ALIANZA POPULAR THOUGH SOME OF THAT MIGHT BE INVOLVED,BUT BECAUSE OF PRINCIPLE. THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF SEATS PER PROVINCE IN THE LOWER HOUSE OUGHT TO BE THREE OR FOUR, THOUGH TWO WOULD BE ALL RIGHT AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED. THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE REALLY WAS THE MANNER OF VOTING, IN WHICH THERE SHOULD BE LIST DISCIPLINE AND NO POSSIBILITY OF SPLIT TICKETS OR COMPLICATED SCHEMES OF PREFERENTIAL VOTING. (CURIOUSLY, THE PSOE SOCIALISTS ALSO TOOK A LOOK AT THIS ISSUE THE SAME WAY, WHILE THE VARIOUS MINI PARTIES PREFER SOMETHING

MORE COMPLICATED IN THE HOPES OF GETTING SEATS.

7. HE HAD ALWAYS THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF POLARIZAION. WHAT ONE HAD TO HOPE FOR WAS A COHERENT CENTER RIGHT WITH SOME OF HHS COLLEAGUES BEING MORE TO THE RIGHT. TENDING TOWARD THE CENTER ONE OR TWO COHERENT CENTRIST GROUPINGS (HE DISMISSED THE AREILZA, CABANILLAS PARTIDO POPULAR AS GOING NOWHERE). AND A GROWTH OF MODERATION IN THE PSOE, FELIPE GONZALEZ AND MOST OF HIS COLLEAGUES WERE MORE INTERESTED IN SPEECHES THAN PRACTICAL POLITICAL, THOUGH HE EXEMPTED MUGICA THE "MOST INTERESTING AND PUZZLING" SOCIALIST FIGURE FROM THIS STRICTURE. IF THE PSOE DID NOT MODERATE, SOMEONE ELSE WOULD TAKE OVER THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALTHOUGH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HERE WERE REALLY NOT SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND THUS NOT MUCH OF A OPTION. STABLER

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